

Introduction

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This collection of occasional papers began life as an annual series of seminars in the Historic Built Environment. While the initial collaboration between the Historic Towns and Villages Forum,¹ the Herbert Lane Trust² and Kellogg College in 2014 focused on urban development in historic towns, it took as its main theme the topic of New Town Heritage as explored at the HTF annual conference in 2013 – (New Towns, Garden Cities and Utopian Masterplanning – Cities of the Past, Cities of the Future) – and has grown through a series of set-topic seminars and annual events that include collaboration with several universities, agencies, practitioners, civic societies and interested individuals, even as the topic of New Town Heritage itself has taken on more significance during a time in which issues to do with urban planning, growth, the green belt and historic core areas, have deepened.

The collection itself is representative of the conversation around this perennial issue and includes traditional academic research, anecdotal pieces, think pieces and explorations of what form

future research and thinking around the topic might take. In that sense it is not a formal collection of academic papers, rather perhaps instead an opener into how we think about built heritage, the significance we give to its background and how we consider architecture and urban planning as a forerunner to placemaking as well as a benchmark for successful design within an historic core, and of course, what we actually consider to be heritage, and where New Towns, a heritage genre of their own, fit into this argument.

The first paper in this collection, *Post-war New Town Heritage – Debates, Tensions and Prospects*,³ provides the context within which New Town Heritage sits, and is, as well as a succinct background to the history of the post-war New Town ideal, a call to action for future debate around the topic. Authors Bob Colenutt and Sabine Coady Schaebitz write their paper from the perspective of the collaborative Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project that they lead on the burgeoning New Town Heritage Network, and raise the questions we all must ask about the place of the New Town within the academic and practical heritage and historical sphere. The second paper launches straight into the issue of New Town Heritage and indeed, its faded glory – the hopes and ideals of aspirational New

1 The Historic Towns Forum, or HTF, as was.

2 The Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages, as was.

3 This paper came out of an AHRC funded project on the New Town Heritage Network which has seen a series of events this year (2017) in New Towns celebrating anniversaries (Milton Keynes – 50); Harlow (70) and Peterborough (50) held jointly with Oxford Brookes University, Coventry University, Milton Keynes Council, Milton Keynes Development Corporation, Harlow Council, Harlow Civic Society, and Vivacity Peterborough.

Town planning and how that has been captured both through anecdote and image. 'Every House on Langland Road,'⁴ by Darren Umney and Simon Phipps, a design academic and a photographer, respectively, takes as its case study Netherfield – that much maligned Derek Walker-designed early 70s housing estate in the New Town of Milton Keynes. It is a piece as carefully crafted as the initial vision of Netherfield itself and considers the conceit of a modern version of new Georgian architecture set within a halcyon, once agricultural landscape as perhaps more of an artistic statement of visual placemaking than as a place made for people to live. Which is no slight on Netherfield, for although earmarked for long-overdue regeneration its popularity with current and original residents does not wane and is testament perhaps to incorporation of earlier principles of space and social belonging in the masterplan as opposed to the questionable desirability of pastiche 'historical' housing estates that place the need for social interaction below the desire for faux aesthetics.

This takes us neatly into Roger Kitchen's conversational piece which follows the tenet of social planning being an integral part of successful urban and New Town masterplanning. 'Milton Keynes: the Social Blueprint – Banning the New Town Blues?'⁵ takes us back to Roger's time as a

Community Worker in the early days of Milton Keynes. The time when the New Town was literally a building site – a vision of a utopian wild west with all the potential of a new life for its pioneering inhabitants. Roger stresses how vital an understanding of the inclusion of the human element is to sustain successful planning – the life of a new development does not begin until the people move and actually live there – and in this Roger leads us into the following paper through his mention of the (at the time) forthcoming Wolfson Prize, which challenged entrants to design a visionary, popular and viable Garden City as a hefty nod towards finding solutions for the growth crisis. David Rudlin's think piece on 'The Historic Town and the Garden City'⁶ details URBED's winning submission for the Wolfson Prize in that year (2014) and posits that New Towns/Garden Cities should maximise existing infrastructure rather than starting from scratch.

In this, David takes us through the thinking behind the design of Uxcester, a sort of urban extension take on Oxford that considers how judicious and confident use of the green belt might alleviate some of our adversarial planning issues and how we might look to some of our more successful continental cousins, such as Freiburg, as exemplars. Tying in with this ethos is Jon Rowland's 2015 paper, 'A 21st Century Historic City – Historic Towns and

4 This paper comes out of the Arts Council England funded project, 'Every House on Langland Road' (2017).

5 This paper came from the HTF/MKCDC joint event, 'New Towns, Garden Cities and Utopian Masterplanning – Cities of the Past, Cities of the Future' (Milton Keynes, 2013).

6 This paper came from the joint Chester Civic Trust/ ASHTAV/HTF event 'Urban Expansion and Growth in Historic Towns – accommodating the inevitable? Models for positive change' (Chester, 2014).

Green Belt Issues,⁷ which explores more fully the Wolfson Prize concept and how growth in the green belt could be seen as a viable and positive solution and not something to rail against with our Village Green Preservation Society hats on. Jon Rowland's paper came from our second seminar series - 'Historic Towns and the Green Belt Issue' in 2015, and is a think piece that encourages collaboration between Local Authorities, practitioners and residents - something of a no-brainer one might think but nevertheless something that requires constant encouragement and effort.

With these thoughts in mind, we move from here back into New Town Heritage proper, with Peter Larkham's invigorating academic piece on 'Conserving the Post-Second World War Reconstruction: a Contentious Idea,'⁸ which explores firstly how the issues of heritage and conservation were dealt with between c. 1941 and 1973 (the post-Second World War reconstruction era) and secondly, how the heritage of that era is dealt with today, in terms of what is kept, redeveloped, altered or destroyed. He uses the city of Birmingham as his main example and his main question, 'how does the reconstruction become heritage?' is absolutely central to how we determine what is authentic, what is new, what is

worthy and worth saving and what is actually heritage in New Town Heritage conservation now - and how we draw those subjective lines.

Finally then, we come to 'Heritage versus Innovation: the Grenoble Experience.'⁹ Gilles Novarina and Stéphane Sadoux first explore the context of historic conservation in Europe, and then consider how this has become the preserve of the urban planner and architect, and what this means in terms of innovation and growth within successful historic cities, and more particularly in the university town of Grenoble. Specifically they explore the relationship between the town in the mountains, the industrial town and how the link between town, science and higher education provides both a narrative and a platform to understand the historicity of its development as well as its success. It provides a timely and useful juxtaposition with the actual development happening on that basis in Cambridge, and more latterly Oxford, which Rowland touches upon in his paper. Indeed, Novarina and Sadoux presented a version of this paper at the 2016 HTF Symposium, 'Growing Historic Cities,' held at Kellogg College in September of that year. The Symposium explored how developments in Cambridge, Freiburg and Grenoble might inform the future of Oxford's own growth.

7 This paper came from the HTF/ASHTAV/Kellogg Historic Built Environment Seminars, 'Planning for the Historic Environment (Oxford, 2015).

8 This paper came from the HTF/ASHTAV/Kellogg Historic Built Environment Seminars, 'The New Towns agenda - masterplanning for New Towns, Garden Cities and urban extensions in the historic environment - theory, practise and examples' (Oxford, 2014).

9 This paper came from the joint HTF/URBED conference, 'Growing Historic Cities' (Oxford, 2016).

And so, to conclude, we have here presented a sample of 5 years of events and research and thinking about the issue of what exactly is New Town Heritage and what it means, not only to those who plan it, design it, build it, codify it, list it, study it, and legislate it, but also to those who live in it and remember it as something that is evidence of real lives lived – something that is a continuation of what we, as humans, have always done – that is, make places.

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